

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05
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R 080857Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2069
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY PARITLUINTC
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 5562

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINS, TS

SUBJ: AUGUST 10 SAID TO BE DATE FOR ACHOUR TRIAL; PSD PAPER
CRITICIZES LIBYAN INTERFERENCE

REF: TUNIS 3696, MAY 23, 1978.

1. AUGUST 5 ISSUE OF DEMOCRATIE, OPPOSITION (SOCIAL
DEMOCRATS) WEEKLY, REPORTED THAT GOT HAS FIXED
AUGUST 10 AS OPENING DAY FOR TRIAL OF HABIB ACHOUR AND
OTHER ARRESTED UGTT EXECUTIVE BUREAU MEMBERS. EMBASSY HAS
HEARD SIMILAR REPORT FROM USUALLY WELL-INFORMED
JOURNALISTIC SOURCE. WHILE BOTH REPORTS MAY DERIVE
ULTIMATELY FROM SINGLE SOURCE, INDICATIONS STRONG THAT
TUNIS UGTT TRIAL IS IMMINENT. ACHOUR CAMP CONFIRMS TO US
THAT TRIAL NOW SCHEDULED FOR MID-AUGUST. THEY MAINTAIN
TRIAL DURING RAMADAN FAVORS GOVERNMENT INTERESTS,
OPPOSES THEIR OWN. REASON: ACHOUR AND MOST OTHER
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EXECUTIVE BUREAU DEFENDANTS STRICTLY OBSERVE RAMADAN
FASTING. THEREFORE, ORDINARY PHYSICAL ORDEAL OF TRIAL
PROCESS COMPOUNDED BY LACK OF FOOD, WATER, AND TOBACCO.

2. AUGUST 5 EDITION OF DEMOCRATIE PRINGED FULL TEXT OF
ACHOUR LETTER TO PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA (WRITTEN FROM
PRISON MAY 17, 1978) AND EXTRACTS FROM ACHOUR'S LONG

LETTER TO EDITOR OF PSD DAILY AL-AMAL (MAY 1, 1978 FROM PRISON) IN WHICH HE REFUTED PSD "WHITE PAPER" VERSION OF GENERAL STRIKE AND RIOTS OF JANUARY 26 (SEE REFTEL FOR SUMMARY AND ANALYSES). EXISTENCE OF LETTERS HAD BEEN KNOWN IN POLITICAL CIRCLES FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, AND PARIS-BASED WEEKLY JEUNE AFRIQUE HAD MADE REFERENCE TO THEM IN AUGUST 2 EDITION. GOVERNMENT SO FAR HAS NOT MADE COMMENT ON LETTERS.

3. EMBASSY HAS HEARD FROM NUMBER OF USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCES THAT GOVERNMENT IS ALSO CONSIDERING BRINGING EX-FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMED MASMOUDI TO TRIAL (SEPARATELY FROM ACHOUR ET AL) FOR HIS ROLE IN JANUARY 26 EVENTS. SUPPOSEDLY HE IS UNDER SURVEILLANCE AND FOR SEVERAL DAYS RECENTLY HE WAS UNDER HOUSE ARREST. WE UNDERSTAND THAT MINISTRY OF JUSTICE HAS FORMALLY OPENED AN INQUEST AND THAT MASMOUDI WAS CALLED TO GIVE TESTIMONY BEFORE EXAMINING MAGISTRATE ABOUT EIGHT DAYS AGO. IF MASMOUDI IS IN FACT BROUGHT TO TRIAL, CONCLUSION MUST BE DRAWN THAT GOT HAS FINALLY DECIDED IT MUST PLAY MASMOUDI-LIBYAN TRUMP CARD IF CASE AGAINST ACHOUR IS TO BE CONVINCING.

4. VERY ODD EDITORIAL ON FRONT PAGE OF PARTY DAILY L'ACTION ON AUGUST 6 TENDS TO SUPPORT THIS THEORY. ARTICLE RECOUNTS THAT FRENCH COMMUNIST DAILY L'HUMANITE PUBLISHED UNACCEPTABLE DECLARATION BY LIBYAN TRADE UNION
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LEADER JALLOUD ON JULY 29. ACCORDING TO L'ACTION, STATEMENT BY SELF STYLED SECRETARY GENERAL OF ARAB TRADE UNIONS "DOES NOT HIDE" INTENTION OF JALLOUD AND LIBYAN GOVERNMENT TO INTERFERE IN TUNISIAN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS ALONG WITH COMMUNISTS AND BAATHISTS. L'ACTION NOTES THAT L'HUMANITE ALSO PUBLISHED SELECTIVE PORTIONS OF "A LETTER FROM HABIB ACHOUR." WITHOUT EXPLAINING NATURE OF LETTER, L'ACTION NOTES THAT ACCORDING TO L'HUMANITE JALLOUD PREVIOUSLY AND UNSUCCESSFULLY OFFERED LE MONDE 1,468,000 OLD FF TO PUBLISH LETTER. AFTER REFUSAL FROM LE MONDE, JALLOUD SUPPOSEDLY OFFERED LE MATIN 820,000 OLD FF, AGAIN UNSUCCESSFULLY. AT THAT POINT, ARTICLE SAYS, HE THEN TURNED TO L'HUMANITE WHICH "ACCEPTED HIM WITH OPEN ARMS." L'ACTION ASKS "IF IT IS NOT JALLOUD WHO FINANCED THIS PUBLICATION -- ONE HAS RIGHT TO ASK WHO IS PAYING?" (NOTE: APPARENTLY THIS JALLOUD IS THE LIBYAN LABOR FIGURE, AND NOT THE EX-PRIME MINISTER).

5. COMMENT: L'ACTION EDITORIAL IS THE FIRST CRITICAL STATEMENT AGAINST LIBYA WE HAVE SEEN IN TUNISIAN PRESS SINCE INITIAL HINT OF A LIBYAN CONNECTION WHICH APPEARED FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS IMMEDIATELY AFTER JANUARY 26. IF

GOT DECIDES TO MAKE CASE OUT OF LIBYAN INVOLVEMENT IN
"TUNISIAN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS," ACHOUR TRIAL COULD TAKE
ENTIRELY DIFFERENT DIMENSION. NATURALLY, PUBLICLY
PROCLAIMED "HONEYMOON" IN TUNISIAN-LIBYAN RELATIONS COULD
COME TO A QUICK END.
MULCAHY

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